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Fair Housing Goes Nuclear:
In Suburban Chicago the Cold War Meets a Civil Rights Protest in 1967

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
The Department of History

by

Ryan Church Mattingly

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ABSTRACT

In December of 1966 the United States government decided to place a \$375 million atomic accelerator in the all-white, rural town of Weston, Illinois. The small town was located 30 miles west of Chicago, within an affluent suburban county named DuPage. Residents of DuPage were thrilled to receive the atomic installation because it would spark new economic growth in the area. However, the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing (NCDH) immediately protested the approval of the Weston site. They opposed the site choice because of a documented history of racial housing discrimination in and around Weston. In 1967, the NCDH hoped to utilize the Cold War scientific research plant as political leverage to abolish racial housing discrimination in suburban Chicago. This study argues that the eventual failure of the NCDH's Weston protest illustrates the limits of the federal fair housing policy changes during the late 1960s.

INTRODUCTION

On February 8, 1967, Jack E. Wood, Jr., and Edward Rutledge, Executive Directors of the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing (NCDH), traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify before the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy (JCCAE). They went to the nation's capitol with one goal in mind: to convince Congress to delay the approval of a \$375 million atomic accelerator site selection in Weston, Illinois until the town's history of housing discrimination was addressed.¹ The small, farming village of Weston was located approximately thirty miles west of Chicago and was situated in the predominantly white suburban county of DuPage.² To the local boosters, the construction offered a chance for their area to become "The Atom Capital of the World."³ To the NCDH, however, the decision was a battle cry.

Immediately after Weston was awarded the scientific research prize on December 16th, 1966, the NCDH began to organize its opposition to the site's approval. They perceived that the rural site selection of the Atomic Energy Committee (AEC), by design, excluded Chicago's large African American population. Wood and Rutledge argued that DuPage County possessed a long and documented record of preventing African Americans the opportunity to purchase or rent homes. Additionally, racial housing discrimination helped make the Chicago metropolitan area the most segregated city in the country during the 1960s. To the NCDH, the culture of discrimination in and around Weston made the AEC's site choice morally and socially unacceptable. The NCDH

recognized that the preexisting levels of housing discrimination in the Weston area would prevent Chicago's inner-city blacks from accessing the new federal jobs that would be generated by the new technological windfall.⁴

Wood and Rutledge quickly realized that the Weston site approval process gave them an opportunity to stall the AEC's selection due to a set of 1960s civil rights guarantees. The NCDH believed that John F. Kennedy's 11063 executive order of 1962 and Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act both offered the necessary legal tools to establish a fair housing requirement in all federal policies. In their 1967 congressional testimony, the NCDH seized the new political momentum to argue for the establishment of fair and open housing in suburban Chicago. They asserted that federal mandates forced the federal government to use its money and power to help create equal opportunities for racial minorities to obtain housing and jobs.

At the time of the AEC site announcement, the NCDH believed that the government's stance on awarding federal contracts to communities was nondiscriminatory. However, their actions were anything but nondiscriminatory. Instead, the NCDH argued that the federal government was supporting decisions that kept the status quo by ignoring the efforts of suburban communities to keep racial minorities out.

The written AEC site selection criteria, in accordance with Kennedy's executive order and Title VI, expressed in bold language that the agency would only consider communities that were open to people of every race.⁵ During the site selection process, the AEC maintained that it would strongly consider "the climate of equal opportunity and nondiscrimination existing in the communities surrounding the six prospective sites."⁶

The NCDH believed that the choice of Weston flew in the face of the AEC's earlier assurance. The region's longstanding and visible record of discriminatory practices in housing led Wood and Rutledge to argue that, "Weston clearly fails to meet one of the major AEC site selection criteria for its atomic installation."⁷

Wood and Rutledge announced during the 1967 Joint Committee hearing that they would welcome the atomic site choice if the Illinois legislature adopted an enforceable fair housing law. The NCDH hoped to use the AEC's earlier fair housing promise as a tool to open the suburban housing market to African Americans trapped in Chicago's isolated ghettos. Wood and Rutledge argued that the Joint Committee's unconditional approval of the Weston site would "have the effect of fastening even more tightly the bands of discrimination, poverty and unemployment which now enchain nearly one million Negroes to the Chicago ghettos."⁸ If Kennedy's executive order, Title VI and the AEC site criteria were to be taken seriously, they believed, Congress held an obligation to use the Weston site approval process to open up the resources of the suburbs to Chicago's African Americans. Wood and Rutledge demanded that the final authorization of funding for the atomic research be postponed until Illinois passed a Fair Housing Law. This study will argue that the ultimate failure of their attempt illustrates the limits of the United States' fair housing policy changes during the late 1960s.

THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE WESTON SITE PROTEST

Wood and Rutledge were the constant driving force behind the NCDH protest of the atomic accelerator site choice. Three years prior to the AEC site announcement, the two men would become the Executive Directors of the NCDH at a crucial juncture in the

organization's history. NCDH President Charles Abrams, a long-time activist for housing rights in New York, believed that in the mid-1960s the NCDH had an unprecedented chance to reform federal housing policies.⁹ Abrams became the President in of the NCDH in 1961, the same year John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States. Kennedy's earlier campaign promises gave Abrams and the NCDH reason to hope that the federal government was going to start addressing the national trend of racial housing discrimination. Eventually, Kennedy partially followed through on his earlier guarantees by signing a 1962 executive order, which required the federal government to ensure equal opportunities in all federally financed housing programs.¹⁰ In 1964 Abrams' hired Wood and Rutledge to help utilize the new civil rights commitment of the United States.

Abrams' chose Wood and Rutledge because of their impressive experience in the civil rights and housing field.¹¹ Their expertise would immediately bring fresh perspective and new direction to the NCDH. Perhaps even more important to Abrams and the NCDH, was the fact that Wood and Rutledge came to the job with a comprehensive knowledge of federal housing policies. Their ability to understand and cooperate with politicians allowed them to exercise the new civil rights mechanisms to abolish discriminatory barriers African American's experienced when trying to purchase or rent a home.

Wood and Rutledge redefined the scope of the organization as soon as they assumed leadership roles in the NCDH. Rutledge declared that the goal was no longer simply about abolishing housing discrimination. Instead, he stated that the NCDH would now be focused "beyond the issue of discrimination per se to those broad social,

economic, and political factors which support and extend the ghetto walls.”¹² Under the new leadership, the organization started to center its efforts on tackling the economic issues facing racial minorities in the mid-1960s. The NCDH attempted to create more economic equality by convincing the federal government to use its influence to make the opportunities of the nation’s suburbs accessible to racial minorities.

In 1965, the NCDH launched an aggressive and sustained nationwide movement for open housing in the nation’s suburbs. Early in their tenure, Wood and Rutledge started this educational campaign to explain the significant impact of housing discrimination on the job opportunities for low-income racial minorities. They argued that for racial minorities living in isolated ghettos, “geography was their destiny.”¹³ Wood and Rutledge explained that if the economic opportunities of the suburbs were accessible to all races it could have the potential to alleviate the unemployment of those suffering in the nation’s inner-cities.¹⁴

During the post-war period, the nation witnessed a frightening rate of industrial decentralization to suburbia. As jobs opportunities moved to the booming suburbs, inner-city residents were experiencing increased economic hardships. Wood and Rutledge recognized the vital connection between jobs and housing. They were alarmed to find that many non-skilled and semi-skilled jobs were out of reach for African American families trapped in the inner-city by racial housing discrimination. To reverse the pattern of uneven development and segregation, they believed it was necessary to abolish racial housing discrimination in the suburbs. In the mid-1960s, the NCDH demanded the enactment of an enforceable and sweeping fair housing law to allow African Americans to access the economic opportunities found in the suburbs.

As Wood and Rutledge took over as Executive Directors in the mid-1960s, the NCDH grasped some limited fair housing victories. They planned to utilize the new set of legislative tools such as, Kennedy's executive order and Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, to begin to break down the racial ghettos of American cities. Over the course of the next few years, the open housing movement would become a crusade, as the NCDH now demanded the federal government follow through on the nondiscriminatory assurances expressed in the 1960s civil rights legislation.

It was in the midst of the NCDH campaign to disperse the ghetto that the AEC site announcement was made. The decision of Weston, Illinois provided Wood and Rutledge with an important opportunity to integrate Chicago's suburbs. They felt strongly that if they could persuade Congress to hold off on the final funding authorization it would motivate the Illinois' legislator to pass a statewide fair housing law. To sway the legislators from supporting the federal funding of the Weston site, Wood and Rutledge delivered a fiery testimony and many letters outlining the need for fair housing protections in the area. They hoped to stall the Weston site approval by convincing the majority of the Joint Congressional Committee that the AEC site choice flew in the face of the new existing federal fair housing mandates.

The influential arguments of the NCDH ignited an intense debate over the final approval for the atomic plant's funding when it came to a Senate vote in June of 1967. In the midst of the debate, a New York Times editorial articulated the mood of many Americans during a summer in which race riots erupted in Newark and Detroit and anti-war protesters marched in Washington, D.C. "The nation is engaged in a bloody war in Vietnam; the streets of its cities are swept by riots born of anger over racial and economic

inequities,” the editorial observed. “It is a distortion of national priorities to commit many millions now to this interesting but unnecessary scientific luxury.”¹⁵

The Chairman of the Joint Committee, Senator John Pastore of Rhode Island, was one of the most steadfast opponents of the AEC decision and became the leading advocate in the congressional fight against the site’s authorization. He spoke for the needs of many struggling northern cities and his opinions were supported by other Democratic senators representing the urban north. Following Pastore’s lead, northern Democratic senators Walter Mondale, Philip Hart and Jacob Javits, were also passionate proponents of the protest against the AEC site selection. They agreed that the federal government for many years had facilitated the existing pattern of segregation in the United States. During the late 1960s, these Democratic senators argued that they had a moral responsibility to right earlier injustices by taking active steps to destroy the walls of discrimination between the nation’s cities and suburbs. The liberal senators believed that the open housing ideology of the NCDH could help cool the mounting tensions in the nation’s cities.

Pastore’s concern over the civil rights problems related to the Weston selection led him to invite the NCDH to testify to the Joint Committee. He hoped that the NCDH testimony would convince enough of his colleagues that they needed to block the approval of the Weston site until Illinois passed a statewide fair housing law. Pastore underscored the irony when he wrote: “in the name of advancing science and technology we should not be guilty of retreating from our boasted principles of equity, equality and humanity.”¹⁶

Not all of the politicians on the Joint Congressional Committee shared the ideological views of those senators who sympathized with the NCDH. Support or opposition of the Weston site selection was largely decided along urban/suburban and liberal/conservative lines. Republican Joint Committee member Melvin Price of Illinois was representative of the members who opposed the NCDH fair housing demands for the site. He felt the rights of suburban homeowners in Illinois should not be infringed upon with a federally forced state fair housing law. Price argued that the use of the AEC site as a “civil rights carrot” to award to states with strong open housing legislation was unacceptable. He believed, like many other Republicans on the Joint Committee, that moral civil rights considerations should not be considered in the Weston site approval because the federal government did not have any precedent for doing so. “Although we have located many atomic facilities in the past twenty years this question has not previously been raised,” he argued.¹⁷

Everett Dirksen, the influential Republican Senate Minority leader from Illinois, was outraged by what he declared was “an evil precedent.” Not only would his state suffer, but he also argued to protect the 29 other states that did not have fair housing legislation at the time. During the final approval for the site, Dirksen delivered a biting and sarcastic retort to the Democrat’s efforts to block the Weston site. “I’ll have a list and I’ll keep it handy, just wait until appropriations, authorizations for federal projects come along for these states. The same standard will apply,” Dirksen declared.¹⁸ Conservatives, like Dirksen, strongly asserted during the site approval debate that the Joint Committee could not inflict its moral authority on state and local governments.

Countering Dirksen, Pastore rejoined, “perhaps we are setting a precedent and the precedent will be that any time a governmental agency brings up the question of fair opportunity, they make that a predicate.”¹⁹ Democratic Senator Philip Hart of Michigan, a notable civil rights advocate, also tried to soften the fear over the creation of an unreasonable precedent. He believed that blocking the funding for the Weston site gave the government an opportunity to right a previous wrong and practice what it preached. To Hart, the atomic site approval presented a chance to provide all citizens with equal access to good jobs, a decent home and a quality education. Senator Hart’s statements reiterated the ideology of Wood and Rutledge. Such aspirations for equal opportunity to jobs and housing in Weston would only become a reality if the Senate acted on the mandate of Title VI and Kennedy’s executive order. Otherwise, Hart believed that the federal government “would have failed to take up the challenge of a future for citizens of our blighted urban ghettos.”²⁰

THE ORIGINS OF THE NCDH

To gain a deeper understanding of the 1967 fair housing philosophy of Wood, Rutledge and that of the supportive legislators, a look at the earlier history of the NCDH is imperative. The NCDH roots can be traced back to a local organization called The New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing (NYSCDH). The future President of the NCDH, Charles Abrams, helped oversee the creation of the NYSCDH in 1948. Upon its creation the organization consisted of sixteen local civil rights groups, all with the collective goal of ending racial discrimination in housing.²¹ The radical thoughts of Abrams would form the basis of the New York Fair Housing Committee’s ideology, which would also become the philosophy for its predecessor organization, the NCDH.

“If Negroes are integrated with whites into self-contained communities without segregation,” Abrams believed, “initial tensions tend to subside, differences are reconciled and cooperation develops—in short, an environment is created in which interracial harmony will be achieved.”²²

The New York Fair Housing Committee was created in response to the emerging housing crisis for urban African Americans, during one of the largest racial demographic shifts in United States history. In the Second Great Migration, occurring after World War II, a total of 1.5 million African Americans moved from the rural south to the nation’s northern cities. The demographic shift was one of the largest population movements of the twentieth century and rapidly changed the racial makeup of the urban north.²³ Like the first movement of southern blacks northward during World War I, the second wave of the African American Great Migration increased the level of tension and violence between whites and racial minorities who attempted to buy and occupy housing in the urban north.²⁴ It was in this historical context that the NCDH emerged to address the escalation of racial segregation in the urban north.

As African American’s increasingly moved into northern cities, whites just as quickly relocated to the suburbs under the banner of their collective whiteness. Whites were able to flee the nation’s cities with the help of federal mortgage assistance programs. Home ownership programs, such as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) loans, were put in place during the New Deal era. The FHA and the VA provided low-interest, long-term loans to whites, allowing millions of Americans to become new homeowners.²⁵ The government subsidized loans expanded housing construction to unprecedented levels in the excitement of borrowing

and building. However, African Americans found it increasingly difficult to get in on the housing boom provided by lower interest rates, often finding their neighborhoods were “redlined,” from being eligible.²⁶

The mass suburbanization of whites and the ghettoization of blacks was one of the most profound population shifts of the twentieth century. In American Apartheid, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton provide strong evidence of how post-war federal housing policies contributed significantly to the decline of the inner-city by encouraging the selective out-migration of middle-class whites to the suburbs.²⁷ Migrant African Americans’ hopes for achieving equality often went unrealized, as they found a de facto segregation system in the urban north that enforced the color line just as effectively as its de jure southern counterpart.

In the late 1940s, Charles Abrams declared that federal housing policies were effectively containing African Americans by their race in the ghettos of American cities. He observed that the results of federal housing policies effectively concentrated the poor in central cities and dispersed the affluent to the suburbs. It was abundantly clear to Abrams and his fellow fair housing activists that New Deal reforms encouraged and facilitated private home ownership for white families while leaving black families behind.²⁸

The year that the NYSCDH was founded was a significant one for fair housing reform. The Shelley v. Kraemer decision in May of 1948 prohibited neighborhood property owners from refusing to sell or rent to ethnic and racial minorities. This gave civil rights activists, such as Abrams, the momentum they had been waiting for. The NYSCDH was quickly created in order to use the weight of the Shelley decision to attack

the institutional racism of the FHA on the local, and soon the national level. Open housing advocates hoped that with concerted action they could abolish residential segregation once and for all.²⁹ However, their initial optimism turned to disappointment, as the Shelley decision failed to prevent the FHA from underwriting mortgages containing racial covenants. After 1948, the FHA continued to encourage the growth of suburbs, which still blocked African American home ownership, by refusing to provide loans to racially mixed neighborhoods.

It did not take long for the NYSCDH to expand its scope to the national level. The Housing Act of 1949 sparked the need for a national committee for fair housing. When the federal government adopted the Housing Act of 1949 it created an unprecedented opportunity to reshape cities by race through a system of grants for major federal funding of local urban redevelopment projects. The New York open housing advocates quickly realized the need to create a larger organization to pressure the federal government to integrate the nation's cities.

Quickly after the Housing Act of 1949 was accepted, the NYSCDH decided to hold a national conference to brainstorm ways in which it could influence and reform the new federal urban renewal policies. At the conference, a group of New York fair housing activist decided to create a national committee to undo the legacy of discrimination in the nation's suburbs and cities. Thus, the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing (NCDH) was officially formed in June of 1950. The members were united in purpose; unanimously agreeing the NCDH should "provide a mechanism for the pooling of national and local organization resources."³⁰ The NCDH was created with the intent of maintaining a limited role, stating "it would be unwise for the new group to assume

functions which might leave the organization open to jurisdictional disputes.” The members also decided that the mission of the NCDH program “should be one of action primarily and research secondarily.”³¹

The initial national headquarters of the NCDH consisted of a tiny, ten feet by fifteen feet office, which also served as the office for the earlier NYSCDH.³² The organization started out as a modest independent research committee. In 1950, the fair housing committee was made up of fifteen national labor, religious and civil rights groups, all working towards the goal of open housing.³³ These organizations sought to use their collective strength to transform the direction of federal and local housing policies. In doing so, the NCDH hoped it could begin to break apart the nation’s racial ghettos and spark real change in the segregated conditions of society.³⁴

1950s: NCDH EFFORTS TO TEAR DOWN THE WALLS OF DISCRIMINATION

From its conception in the early 1950s, the NCDH gradually grew into somewhat of a social movement. The organization brought a variety of interest groups together to engage in a direct action protest against federal and local housing policies that promoted segregation. The NCDH sought to accomplish a nation-wide, open housing market by removing restrictions based on race, creed, and national origin. For the next few decades, it would be the only national agency working in civil rights field that focused exclusively on fair housing issues.

In addition to its direct action protest of the 1950s, the NCDH attempted to reform the segregated conditions of the United States by exposing the reality of racial discrimination in housing markets. By informing the public of the benefits of

desegregated housing, the organization hoped to break down the barriers racial minorities encountered when trying to move into white residential areas. Research was a primary focus as well as providing legal assistance to those ready to challenge discrimination in the housing market. Another important mission of the NCDH was their publication of newsletters and reports. For instance, the bi-monthly publication Trends in Housing was an important way for the NCDH to spread the word about issues related to the open housing struggle. The most important objective of the NCDH, however, was to place constant pressure on the Housing and Home Financing Agency (HHFA) and the Public Housing Authority (PHA) to change racial policies on open occupancy and racial integration.³⁵

After the NCDH was created its predominant focus was on reforming the new federal housing policies adopted after the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954. These two Housing Acts dramatically reshaped the relationship of the federal government with the nation's cities. For instance, the passage of the Housing Act of 1949 created the Public Housing Administration (PHA) to oversee a quickly growing public housing program. The PHA would construct 810,000 public housing units in six years. Suburban historian, Kenneth Jackson describes that "the result, if not the intent of the public housing program was to segregate the races, to concentrate the disadvantaged in the inner cities and reinforce the image of suburbia as a place of refuge."³⁶ The Housing Act of 1949 also provided funds for massive urban redevelopment programs in American cities, providing municipalities with the funds to clear slums and make way for new growth. Five years later, the passage of the Housing Act of 1954 enabled the Eisenhower administration to

provide municipal government's with a staggering amount of money in order to reshape their cities along racial lines.

The National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) was a key lobbying force behind the new Housing Acts, because their enactment established the legal and political tools for local real estate interests to designate and clear poor urban neighborhoods. The NCDH believed that the invested interest of the NAREB in the the passage of the legislation came from their desire to further restrict the mobility of African Americans while increasing housing opportunities for whites. Charles Abrams understood that "homeowners, home-builders, and mortgage-lenders seemed convinced that people should live only with their own kind, that the presence of a single minority family destroys property values and undermines social prestige and status."³⁷ Abrams' believed that this ideology had become the post-war "gospel" of both local and national policy makers who were making racial discrimination and neighborhood congruity an official order. The NCDH identified that the intentional and enduring efforts of the real estate industry were clearing out African American neighborhoods in the name of progress. During the urban renewal process, many cities were using public housing and slum clearance funds as oppressive devices for segregating people based on race and class.³⁸

The NCDH waged an all out attack on urban renewal policies. As watch dogs they were quick to see how the federal housing policies created by the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954, were critically reducing the supply of low-rent housing. The NCDH constantly vocalized their disdain for the federal government's discriminatory housing policies during the 1950s. They argued that the passage of the 1949 and 1954 Housing

Acts began to critically reduce the supply of low rent housing in the nation's cities.

During the implementation of these acts the nation witnessed a net loss of 51,000 low rental units. The NCDH argued that racial minorities, who made up two-thirds of those displaced, were forced into overcrowded ghettos because of restricted housing market and high prices.

The implementation of the 1949 and 1954 Housing Acts led the NCDH to declare that the federal government must stop utilizing its money and power to help local municipalities segregate neighborhoods by race. They explained that the new federal housing policies financed the displacement of African Americans' while also limiting their mobility through discriminatory lending practices. The NCDH understood that the government was fostering and perpetuating a pattern of unequal and segregated development within cities and suburbs in the north. In the early days of the organization, the NCDH strongly criticized Eisenhower's public housing and urban renewal programs because they were being utilized to create the racial isolation of blacks in inner cities.

In the 1950s, the federal government's role in the development of city's expanded significantly. The new Housing Acts allowed the federal government to finance local government's creation of spatial separation between races: African Americans in cities, whites in suburbs. During the New Deal era the federal government began to limit African Americans' mobility by supporting the politics of racial "containment" that defined the Cold War era.³⁹ It was clear that the policies of slum clearance, urban renewal and the creation of public housing were being used as tools for "Negro removal." These mechanisms were helping to establish a hard and fast pattern of racially segregation on a city/suburb divide. The NCDH constantly focused on preventing the

Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 from supporting and reinforcing the spread of residential segregation. The organization's attempts at reform were largely unsuccessful as patterns of segregation and uneven development continued throughout the decade.

1954 was another significant year for the NCDH. In May of that year the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision outlawed "separate but equal." Along with the Supreme Court ruling came cautious optimism for fair housing activist that federal housing policies would begin to help establish residential integration. Frank Horne, the Director of the Racial Relation Services (RRS) and a founding member of the NCDH, believed that the Brown decision provided the opportunity for the Eisenhower administration to remove all racial restrictions in the housing market. However, Horne and his fellow NCDH members were extremely disappointed in the years that followed Brown, as a federal housing policy of "separate but adequate" continued to be enforced.⁴⁰

It quickly became apparent that Eisenhower's housing program would continue to ignore any policy changes resulting from the Supreme Court's ruling of "separate but equal is inherently unequal."⁴¹ In more vivid language, urban historian Arnold Hirsch captures the Eisenhower approach to the housing crisis as, "the popular image of a white suburban noose looping around a black-occupied core."⁴² In 1955 the NCDH charged that, "federal, state and local authorities all bear the responsibility of seeing to it that public funds should not be used to perpetuate discriminatory housing policies."⁴³ The Brown decision ultimately did nothing to change urban renewal and public housing policies from being used as both national and local footholds for segregation and inequality. To address the failures of Brown at abolishing racial housing segregation, the NCDH began lobbying for a federal executive order in 1956 to ban discrimination in

publicly supported housing. Eisenhower would repeatedly ignore their efforts in the remaining years of his second term.

1960s: A NEW ERA FOR THE NCDH

By the early 1960s the growing influence of the NCDH aided in the passage of some new federal fair housing legislation. An increased level of interest and compassion for the issue of racial discrimination in housing gave the NCDH a major boost in funding as well. The increased funding led to the rapid growth of the organization during the 1960s. By 1964 the organization expanded from its original fifteen members to include forty-six interracial and civil right organizations, including all of the national civil rights organizations.⁴⁴

In February of 1967, the same month Rutledge and Wood spoke before the Joint Committee, the NCDH released a blistering report titled “How the Federal Government Builds Ghettos.” Wood and Rutledge’s testimony would reference many conclusions of that report. In strong and scornful language, the report accused federal policy of continuing to foster geographical racial segregation between white suburbs and African American ghettos. Their scathing analysis outlined the ways in which the federal government facilitated racial segregation (both directly and indirectly) during the New Deal era. It concluded that the federal government was “primarily responsible for undergirding a ghetto system that dominates, distorts and despoils every aspect of life in the United States today.”⁴⁵

Throughout the post-war period, the placement of government jobs in the suburbs was furthering unequal opportunities between white suburbanites and African American

city dwellers. Federal agencies such as the AEC were overwhelmingly locating government jobs in middle-class suburbs rather than in urban areas. New opportunities for federal government employment were often made inaccessible by housing discrimination against racial minorities. “The growth policies of New Deal liberalism and the emergence of the Cold War military-industrial complex shaped the spatial patterns of development in the postwar suburbs,” states urban historian Matthew Lassiter.⁴⁶ The NCDH charged that housing discrimination prevented African Americans from accessing the new federal jobs at a level equal to whites.

Cold War politics considerably increased the amount of spending on civil defense and federal scientific research programs. Between 1945 and 1970, a massive industrial complex developed by Cold War military spending transformed the United States. Federal incentives and tax policy aimed to promote suburban areas for new military and scientific installations. New communities were being built in the urban periphery around various scientific research plants during the early decades of the Cold War. The rise of “cities of knowledge,” as historian Margaret Pugh O’Mara has called them, moved economic activity away from the central cities.⁴⁷ In the decades following World War II, federal scientific research spending was turning quiet agricultural areas like Weston, Illinois, into booming and elite suburbs. These “cities of knowledge” were systematically cut off from the urban poor by the elimination of affordable housing through the zoning code and racial discrimination.

The suburban placement of jobs was a major contributing factor to a long period of urban decline. The lack of low and moderately priced suburban housing, combined with loan practices that controlled suburban growth, meant that African Americans could

not easily move to federal employment sites, ensuring unequal opportunities for federal jobs.⁴⁸ The increased anger and hostility African Americans' experienced from white homeowners during this economic crisis would become extremely visible in a series of violent race riots occurring in United State's cities like Watts and Detroit during the mid-1960s.

The lobbying efforts of the NCDH and the commodity race riots during the 1960s, made it clear that racial discrimination in housing was real and preventing the nation from achieving the goals of integration and equality. The shift in federal policy during this period was largely due to the pressure of civil rights groups and an increased awareness of housing discrimination against African Americans. At long last the fair housing movement was realizing some of its objectives and was slowly becoming a national political trend.

President Kennedy's 1962 executive order was one of the first and most significant fair housing victories that the NCDH obtained. At the same time, the executive order disappointed the NCDH because it was limited in scope, only covering housing that would be built in the future. It was a partial order that provided for housing built or bought with federal aid or financed by private mortgages guaranteed or insured by federal agencies. The order left much of the nation's housing stock uncovered because independent banks and savings and loans with federally insured deposits were exempt. Another major flaw to the implementation of the law was that it did not provide any way to enforce the legislation. While Kennedy's executive order was limited and difficult to enforce, the spirit of the legislation would be open to a broader interpretation

by the NCDH. The order did state that it prohibited discrimination in all federally assisted private housing.

The 1962 fair housing victory was bolstered by the passage of Title VI within the 1964 Civil Act. Title VI prohibited racial discrimination in federal housing and created the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The NCDH was not satisfied with Title VI because it still did not forbid discrimination in every federal program. The NCDH explained that the legislation would exclude programs of insurance or guarantee, thus exempting nondiscrimination in the sale of private homes obtained with a FHA or VA mortgage. Like its predecessor, Kennedy's executive order, the enforcement of Title VI was ineffective, largely because HUD officials continued to transfer authority to local officials. With no real enforcement mechanisms, whites continued to resist any kind of open occupancy in the private market and in public housing. However, the passage of Title VI created another important declaration by the federal government that they would play a part in abolishing racial housing discrimination.⁴⁹

Title VI and Kennedy's executive order marked a dramatic change in the relationship between federal policy and metropolitan development. After three decades of federal policy that helped to establish racially segregated neighborhoods, some federal officials began to declare their commitment to open occupancy and the promotion of fair housing. The 1960s guarantees gave the NCDH new mechanisms and momentum to force the federal government to reverse the tide of housing discrimination that they facilitated for so many years in the post-war era.

RESISTANCE OF WHITE HOMEOWNERS TO THE GOALS OF THE NCDH

As the open housing movement demands grew louder, a heated and emotional reaction emerged from white suburban homeowners. The intrusion of African Americans into their suburban communities was seen as a threat to their personal and financial security. Suburban historian Becky M. Nicolaides states, “If they laid a claim to any right, it was that of owning a home and ensuring that this ownership would be protected.”⁵⁰ Whites fought to protect their property values by preaching about the sanctity of local suburban governments and against the corruption of encroaching urban African Americans. The fear of racial transition in their communities helped create a housing market that demanded residential segregation and the belief that the government did not have any business interfering with this market by forcing integration on whites.⁵¹

While the New Deal’s policies had been liberal in many respects, they still retained many racist assumptions. The housing and finance industry of the FHA, for example, effectively operated on segregationist premises and taught whites valuable lessons about what their privilege awarded to them. The New Deal programs trained whites to invest in a philosophy regarding race and property. Suburban historian David Freund summarizes that “a theory about property value and race was codified by ‘urban experts,’ planners, academics, municipal officials, federal housing officials and published their findings.”⁵² White suburbanites would embrace the ideology of the New Deal housing reforms and mobilized politically to restrict their neighborhoods from nonwhites.

By the 1960s however, the new liberals began to revise their views on race, a change that angered many whites. Many suburbanites were extremely concerned about federal fair housing intervention in their communities. The civil rights programs of the

1960s and the integration philosophy of the NCDH seemed to be aimed at undermining their quality of life. Democrats who supported fair housing were starting to earn the reputation amongst blue-collar whites as an elite minority that was suppressing the interests of the majority. The new liberal housing and civil rights reforms galvanized the white working-class to politically organize as a collective group on a national level. During the late 1960s white working-class politics broke free from the Democratic Party and form an organized “conservative backlash” to resist forced racial and economic change.⁵³

Recent scholarship on post-war suburbanization has closely examined the roots of suburban homeowner’s post-war politics and by doing so has traced the origins of a rightward turn in their politics of independence. A group of “new suburban historians” has repeatedly argued that property ownership was the central way many United State’s suburbanites collectively identified in the twentieth century.⁵⁴ These accounts have demonstrated that the creed of property rights and the political engagement it encouraged would become the source behind the 1960s conservative movement and the 1970s tax revolts. Furthermore, they have argued that suburban homeowners believed that their restrictive politics were not driven by racism but rather by recognition that racial integration threatened the “free market” for their property and the integrity of the local governments. In the post-war era, white’s understood all too well the political lessons about the relationship between property, racial privilege, and political rights.⁵⁵

In affluent suburbs like DuPage County, where the atomic accelerator site was located, residents also latched onto a philosophy of class exclusion. By the late 1960s, new fair housing laws meant that class discrimination would become the successor tool

for the practice of state-sponsored residential segregation. The protection of class privileges of affluent suburbanites consistently blocked the issue of racial integration from their communities. Instead, threats of integration were passed over to working-class white communities such as Cicero, where the bloody race riots of 1951 took place.⁵⁶ Suburban historian Kenneth Durr has explained that blue-collar whites, like those living in the Chicago suburb of Cicero, were ever more "preoccupied with community boundaries...because they were not segregated by sheer wealth."⁵⁷ These residents believed that the objectives of liberalism were not going to protect the security of their jobs, the worth of their neighborhoods, or the quality of their lives. Out of a fear of integration and the negative economic effect it would bring to their communities, the white working-class was able to organize a strong and effective counter-attack to the political efforts of the NCDH. In the late 1960s, legislators who sought to reform discriminatory housing policies were left to face the political wrath of working-class constituents who no longer trusted the Democratic Party.

CHICAGO'S 1966 FAIR HOUSING PUSH

It was not just white homeowners who resisted the goals of integration. The open housing movement would also encounter stiff opposition from urban and suburban African Americans. The NCDH fair housing movement in the urban north was never able to gain the same energy and momentum as the southern civil right protest. One explanation for the limited support the NCDH received was the fact that many northern African American's preferred to live in all-black communities. The idea that African American's possessed better economic opportunities in their own communities flourished

in 1966, as the Black Power movement was taking hold in United States cities. In addition, many local African American leaders did not back the integration philosophy of the NCDH, because they suspected that moving into white communities would weaken their own political strength and economic independence. The fair housing ideology was often out of touch with the interests and desires of the masses in the urban north. The failures of the NCDH stemmed from its refusal to acknowledge the fact that many African American's chose to live with people who shared their skin color.

The limited level of support for the open housing movement could be clearly seen as Martin Luther King, Jr., brought the focus of his non-violent civil rights movement on Chicago in 1966. King decided to move to Chicago in order to draw the attention of the nation to the realities of racial segregation and inequality outside of the south. On January 7th, 1966, he formed the Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM), a coalition between his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and local Chicago civil rights leaders such as Al Raby.⁵⁸ The CFM decided to attack segregation in the urban north by focusing on the volatile issue of housing discrimination. To gain the attention of Chicago's political and business leaders, the movement staged a series of open housing demonstrations and marches in the summer of 1966. Because King was a national figure, the marches drew major media attention to racial segregation and inequality outside of the south. However, the CFM protest never gained much backing from Chicago's African Americans community because they continued to prefer to live in all-black residential areas.⁵⁹

The CFM also failed to grasp the complicated layers of social class amongst African American's in the Chicago metropolitan area. Differences in income,

occupation, and status became manifest in a growing residential segregation of the black population of Chicago by class. Blacks fortunate enough to have the resources fled the crowded inner-city, leaving the poor who would continue to bear the brunt of racial and class segregation as they were trapped in the city's worst housing.

After World War II, the rise of an African American middle-class allowed its members to create their own communities in segregated suburbs. The popular historical description of twentieth century suburbanization in the United States all too often excludes this group of African Americans suburban homeowners from its story. Recent scholarship of urban historian Andrew Weise reveals that African Americans created their own communities in spaces outside of the nation's cities. He explained how "spatial and social mobility were two sides of the same coin." African American's routinely moved out of metropolises as they joined the middle-class.⁶⁰ However, the class status of African American suburbanites' was always in a precarious position, as their neighborhoods were the most vulnerable to encroachment by lower-class, inner-city African Americans. Because of this perceived threat, black suburban homeowners constantly fought to keep poorer blacks out in order to insulate themselves and protect their economic stability in the post-war period.⁶¹

The divided consciousness of blacks in Chicago restricted mass protest mobilizations, created far-ranging disagreements over techniques, and limited the movement's power to achieve its open housing objectives. The failure of the CFM stemmed largely from King and his supporters' unfamiliarity with Chicago neighborhood dynamics. Chicago was much larger than any urban area that King and the SCLC had dealt with in the southern civil rights struggle. In 1966, the CFM led by King did not

fully understand the complicated reasons behind African American settlement patterns in the urban north. Black Power leaders in Chicago rejected the idea of social and economic mobility as defined by moving into white neighborhoods. The integration goals of open housing movement were not appealing to most inner-city blacks and the popularity of the black isolation philosophy in the late 1960s illustrated this fact.⁶²

The NCDH and Martin Luther King, Jr. failed to accept that poor blacks wanted no part of integrating white suburban communities and middle class blacks wanted no part of poor blacks' problems. The lofty goals of the open housing movement were simply unpopular among most blacks, rich and poor. While the NCDH and King were unable to ignite massive street protests like those in the southern civil rights movement, they were however able to influence the passage of some limited fair housing laws during the 1960s. These new federal promises in the form of housing legislation gave the NCDH some important new political influence in their struggle to abolish discrimination in the nation's housing markets.

THE FEBRUARY 1967 CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY OF THE NCDH

In order to compel the federal government to enforce its earlier nondiscriminatory declarations, Wood and Rutledge chose the issue of the Weston site approval to wage an all out administrative attack. The NCDH utilized their 1967 testimony against the atomic site selection to block the AEC site selection until Illinois passed enforceable, statewide fair housing legislation that covered the private market. The new federal legislative mandates of the 1960s reinforced the legitimacy of their challenge. If the government's

fair housing promise could be trusted, the NCDH maintained that there was no way that the Weston site could be approved.

By 1966, the NCDH was able to steer the Joint Committee to several legislative mandates that were meant to prevent discrimination against racial minorities in search of housing. The NCDH believed the spirit of the executive order and Title VI established significant new powers to help open up Chicago's suburbs. Wood and Rutledge explained that these legislative protections demanded that African Americans could participate in and enjoy the benefits of all federal programs. The legal guarantees of the federal government would essentially be meaningless, they argued, if the AEC placed their scientific research plant in an area where federal job opportunities were inaccessible to racial minorities.⁶³ Wood and Rutledge concluded their testimony by demanding that the federal government had a moral responsibility to reject the Weston site unless Illinois passed an enforceable fair housing law.

In the midst of a Cold War with the Soviet Union, the NCDH constantly reinforced the idea that the United States held an ethical obligation to block the approval of the Weston site construction. The NCDH argued that if the site were accepted without Illinois and Chicago taking any action to open the job and housing market, the United States would be sending a message that endorsed racial inequality and segregation. In 1966, Kennedy's Presidential successor Lyndon B. Johnson understood this dilemma and he understood the importance of the federal government's role in taking a progressive stance on the issue of fair housing. Johnson pledged that the 1962 executive order called upon the "federal government to undertake action programs to achieve full and equal opportunity as a fact in government life."⁶⁴ Rutledge underlined Johnson's word "action"

when he demanded that the federal government use its funds to provide equal employment opportunities and an open housing market for all citizens. He warned the Joint Committee in his testimony that if this step was ignored then “this nation will have forfeited in advance the opportunity to utilize the last remaining land resource in the Chicago area to facilitate outward movement and suburbanization of thousands of Negro families.”⁶⁵ Wood also saw the Weston project as a “federal development effort” that would create thousands of jobs, homes and businesses. He maintained that any such federal effort should also follow the provisions of Title VI, which prohibited federal spending in a racially discriminatory situation.

In their testimony, Wood and Rutledge continued to stress that the AEC’s site selection criteria outlined the importance of the plant’s placement in an area with a progressive civil rights record. Initially, Rutledge praised the AEC policy for setting a strong civil rights model for other federal government installations to follow. In an article appearing in the September 1966 issue of the NCDH publication Trends in Housing, the organization stated “the AEC is to be commended for requiring an outstanding fair housing record as the essential criteria in locating the site.”⁶⁶ Rutledge even hoped that the AEC precedent would encourage other federal agencies to assure that equal employment and housing opportunities existed in potential sites for their installations.

When the Weston site was announced Rutledge quickly changed his tone from his earlier support of the AEC site selection requirements to adamant disapproval. He now argued that the Weston decision not only “flies in the face of established federal policy, but represents a major retreat from the position publicly enunciated by the AEC itself.”⁶⁷

In a 1967 New York Times article, NAACP President Clarence Mitchell asserted that “if the AEC had set out to find a site where its colored employees, scientists and visitors would be most likely to encounter discrimination in housing, Weston could clearly qualify for that dubious honor.”⁶⁸ The NCDH felt that AEC site selection process must have completely ignored its own fair housing requirements since the Weston area was notorious its record of racial housing discrimination.

In order to sway the Joint Committee members from voting to approve the Weston site, the NCDH tried to link the decision to the ongoing urban crisis. The urban riots of the 1960s gave the NCDH mission an increased urgency as it was clear that something must be done to alleviate the unemployment problems of the inner-city. Rutledge threatened that if the Joint Committee approved the Weston site without the adoption of Illinois’s fair housing legislation, it would only intensify the problems of discrimination and poverty for nearly one million African Americans living in Chicago. He argued “the government of all the people should not and must not enter into a partnership with suburban communities which deliberately exclude Negro citizens from the job and housing market.”⁶⁹

During the mid-1960s, politicians and the mass media were extremely concerned about the deepening urban crisis in cities like Chicago. While the northern open housing protest did not gain massive support among Chicago’s African Americans, it did attract national attention towards the issue of housing discrimination in Chicago. The question of how to deal with the angry and riotous urban crisis was a large part of the national political discourse at the same time of the site approval debate in the summer of 1967. At a time when cities were exploding with anger over racial inequality, the issue of the

atomic site selection provided the NCDH with an opening to change the federal government's stance on racial housing discrimination in the suburbs.

The connection between job opportunities and open housing was a significant and reoccurring point of Rutledge's and Wood's testimony. According to the NCDH, racial housing barriers were canceling out employment opportunities where government installations and plants with federal contracts were located.⁷⁰ The NCDH concluded that the problem of urban poverty was intensified by the lack of available open housing close to new jobs. While the NCDH recognized that the unemployment problem of urban African Americans came from interrelated causes, they emphasized that "there can be no question that the lack of access to suitable housing is a major obstacle in the ghetto dweller's search for a job."⁷¹ The movement of businesses out of the city created a spatial chasm between urban African Americans and jobs during the post-war decades.⁷²

Without Illinois fair housing guarantees, the NCDH warned that the federal installation would be just another example of how the federal government continued to facilitate patterns of racial housing segregation in white suburbs and African American inner cities. The NCDH tried to persuade the Joint Committee that their decision had the potential to affect two critical national issues: unemployment and open housing. Rutledge's testimony demanded that "federal government installations of every magnitude and importance should be located only in communities which are committed to a policy of and are taking affirmative action toward achieving integration."⁷³ He went on to argue that "If Negroes cannot live or work in the Weston area then their legal right to AEC employment is essentially meaningless and without foundation."⁷⁴ In Rutledge's opinion the atomic accelerator site could help relieve the depression-level unemployment

rates among urban blacks. With the evidence of suburban Chicago housing discrimination and the new federal legislative assurances, Rutledge remained confident the Joint Committee would delay the approval of the Weston site.

THE RESULTS OF THE WESTON PROTEST

The 1967 debate over the atomic site approval represented the larger ongoing struggle between civil rights politics and suburban homeowners. While the NCDH gathered enough support and influence to stall the Joint Committee, they ultimately failed to gain the majority backing they needed to block the final funding authorization of the atomic accelerator. The NCDH open housing movement was unsuccessful because it was never able to garner the same attention and support as the massive civil rights protest in southern cities. While the bureaucratic attack of the NCDH did gain the support of a large group of liberal senators, it simply did not gain enough public support to force conservative Republicans and Southern Democrats to take its demands seriously.

In June 1967, the Joint Committee made its final funding recommendations for the plant. The Senate majority report signaled the failure of Wood's and Rutledge's protest, as it recommended the approval for the initial design and construction of the atomic accelerator in Weston. However, Chairman Pastore submitted a dissenting opinion, which echoed the NCDH demands during their February testimony. His report argued that the AEC project be deferred because the approval of the Weston site, would only worsen racial tensions that were already exploding in the nation's cities. In a desperate effort to block the site's approval, the Rhode Island Senator shouted "this is the way you make the summer hotter."⁷⁵ Pastore went on to plead to Congress to withhold

the final approval of the Weston site by asserting “the soul of man is at stake when his dignity is endangered by discrimination. Let us be done with such inequality.”⁷⁶

In the end, Everett Dirksen was able to unite the Republicans with the Southern Democrats to defeat the protest of the NCDH and the liberal senators. Dirksen’s persistent attack against the creation of a civil rights precedent in government installations ultimately won the favor of the majority of the Joint Committee members. Many policymakers feared that their own states would be judged against on a similar open housing model in the future. Furthermore, the senators knew that their suburban homeowner constituents would not approve of a vote withholding appointment of a federal installation to promote integration. Suburban homeowners made up a powerful and influential “silent majority,” that were capable of strongly influencing domestic politics during the late 1960s. Politicians representing these constituents knew that blocking the approval of the atomic site would be committing political suicide. The Weston atomic site approval ultimately suffered from the Joint Committee member’s lack of enthusiasm and desire to abolish racial discrimination in Chicago’s housing market.

On July 12th, 1967, the Weston site was eventually approved by a vote of 47 to 37 that closely followed political party, as well as suburban/city lines. Two weeks later President Johnson signed the bill and approved the first large funding allotment for the atomic accelerator. However, after signing the bill Johnson wrote a statement regarding his own concern over the availability of jobs and housing for the new employees at the atomic research plant in Weston. Holding true to his support of civil rights issues, Johnson demanded the AEC take “bold affirmative action” to insure that “Americans of

all races should have an opportunity to apply to work, and for housing, in connection with this great scientific venture.”⁷⁷

While the NCDH failed to influence the final site selection of the AEC, they did achieve several limited fair housing victories as a result of their protest. Their verbal attacks against the Weston site influenced the creation of ethical objectives in the laboratory itself. In 1969, the leadership of the national atomic accelerator adopted a Policy on Human Rights, which declared their “support of the rights of the members of minority groups in our laboratory and in its environs is inextricably intertwined with our goal of creating a new center of technical and scientific excellence.”⁷⁸ The Director of the laboratory, Robert Wilson, also created an aggressive affirmative action program aimed at employing minorities by setting up training programs for residents of Chicago’s ghettos. The efforts were impressive enough to change the position of Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP from his earlier opposition towards support for the laboratory once it was open.

In addition, the Weston protest of the NCDH was somewhat influential on local fair housing reforms in the suburbs of DuPage County. While statewide legislation was never achieved, more than 30 communities in the area, including Weston itself, passed open housing ordinances by 1968. The sustained protest of the NCDH for fair housing made it impossible for local leaders to ignore the reality of housing discrimination in their communities. During this period the energy and public support behind fair housing reform forced a dramatic political shift in local and national politics, which would eventually lead to the adoption of a federal fair housing law.

THE 1968 FAIR HOUSING ACT

In 1968, the pressure for statewide open housing legislation in Illinois dissolved because of the passage of a national Fair Housing Act, which mandated the abolishment of discriminatory housing practices for all Americans. The legislation also marked a significant reordering of federal policy towards housing.⁷⁹ The national Fair Housing Act was immediately hailed by the NCDH as a reversal of a thirty-year pattern in which the policies of the federal government actively promoted housing discrimination against African Americans.

For several years, President Lyndon B. Johnson pressured Congress to pass the fair housing legislation, but was unable to gather enough support to pass it until 1968. A series of dramatic events occurring in the late 1960s forced Congress to finally acknowledge the nation's increasing social tensions and act to resolve them. The anti-discrimination legislation almost certainly would have lacked the necessary support in Congress if it were not for two significant historic events that swayed public and political opinion.

One of these events was the 1968 release of a report by a commission headed by Illinois' Governor Otto Kerner. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission, in the aftermath of the urban riots to better understand crisis occurring in American cities during the 1960s. The conclusions of the Commission warned that the nation was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal." The Kerner report recommended that the federal government enact a fair housing law and desegregate housing by putting more low-income housing outside central cities.

The other influential event in 1968, and by far the more profound one, was the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4th. The day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed, Johnson urged the House to pass the fair housing bill as a tribute to the civil rights leader. He believed that the federal government needed to make a strong statement to ease the mounting pressure of the ensuing violent race riots in cities throughout the United States. A week after King was murdered; the House followed the President's recommendation and passed the Senate's version of the Fair Housing Act.⁸⁰

The 1968 Fair Housing Act addressed the first recommendation of the Kerner Report, which stated that the federal government should enact a fair housing law. However, the Act did not address the second recommendation of the report, which recommended the creation of more low-income units outside central cities. None of the language in the Fair Housing Act required that the federal government encourage suburban racial integration through the use of subsidized housing. Nor did the Fair Housing Act forbid economic discrimination of any kind or require the government to promote suburban economic integration through any means.

Although the Fair Housing Act was a landmark piece of civil rights legislation, contemporary historians have challenged its success at eliminating housing discrimination after 1968. Mechanisms to implement the anti-discrimination law were intentionally written out of the Fair Housing Act in order to gain votes from moderate Republicans like Everett Dirksen. The disappointments of the 1968 open housing legislation have continued to lead toward the national trend of housing discrimination and segregation. Since the passage of the Fair Housing Act, uneven development has

persisted between the nation's suburbs and inner-cities in more subversive ways through exclusionary zoning and the private market.

CONCLUSION

In 1965 President Johnson gave the commencement speech at Howard University, Jack E. Wood's Alma Mater. In his historic speech, Johnson eloquently summarized the purpose of the NCDH during Wood's and Rutledge's leadership.

We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but real human ability – not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and equality as a result. For the task is to give twenty million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn, grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities – physical, mental and spiritual and to pursue their individual happiness.⁸¹

In 1967, Wood and Rutledge saw the opportunity to use the symbolic power of a multimillion-dollar scientific laboratory to abolish housing discrimination in the Chicago suburbs. They hoped their influence would force the federal government to make good on its earlier legislative promises to create equal opportunities in housing and employment in the nation's cities and suburbs. With the weight of the AEC's atomic installation, the NCDH believed it had a chance to offer the opportunities of Chicago suburbs to African Americans. Wood and Rutledge were full of hope that a federal action could help African American citizens in Chicago realize equal access to a good job, a decent home and a strong education for their children.

In the end, the NCDH's Weston protest never gathered enough strength to force a substantial change in local and federal fair housing policies. The words and ideas of the NCDH failed to capture the hearts and minds of the African American ghetto dwellers, as they continued to choose racial solidarity over forced assimilation. Fair housing

advocates also struggled to overcome the political power of suburban white homeowners, who remained focused on protecting their property values from black encroachment. The failed attempt of the NCDH in 1967 to reform Illinois' fair housing legislation illustrates the limits of the liberal changes in federal housing policies.

Ultimately, the NCDH Weston protest was unable to convince Chicago's African Americans, suburban whites, and the federal government to accept the goals of integration. Today we still live with the legacy of the NCDH disappointments in our nation's segregated cities and suburbs. However, we also live with the hope expressed in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., who declared at the end of the 1967 summer, "that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."⁸² Jack E. Wood, Jr. and Edward Rutledge understood that the arc does not simply bend on its own. They would dedicate their lives to making King's vision a reality.

NOTES

¹ National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing Oral Testimony to the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, February 7th, 1967, Folder 17, Box 165, National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing (NCDH) Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. 1.

² During 1967 the small village of Weston was comprised of seventy-one farms and one hundred households, all of which were white. In DuPage County, only 589 blacks resided in the area out of a population of nearly 400,000. Furthermore, the median income of the area's residents was very high, ranking fourth amongst counties in the nation during the 1960s. Due to restrictive zoning and racial discrimination, the black population in the area remained a fraction of one per cent.² See Theodore J. Lowi and Benjamin Ginsberg, ed., Poliscide (New York, 1976), 115. Poliscide is a case study of the decision to place the atomic accelerator in Weston.

³ J.W. Ahlen, "Fermilab, Scientific Prize of the Century, Takes Root in Northern Illinois," Illinois Issues, 14, September 1976, 1.

⁴ Ed Rutledge and Jack E. Wood, NCDH Oral Testimony to the JCCAE, NCDH Papers, ARC, 12.

⁵ Catherine Westfall gives a comprehensive history of the National Accelerator Laboratory located in Weston, Illinois. Her dissertation traces the laboratory from the early development stages through its first years of operation. She argues that in the post-war period the powerful alliance between the physics community and the Federal Government allowed the atomic plant to be built. Catherine Westfall, "The First 'Truly National Laboratory': The Birth of Fermilab" (PhD. diss., Michigan State University, 1989), 265-266.

⁶ Sites in California, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York and Colorado were the other final candidates for the atomic laboratory. Wood and Rutledge explained that out of the six states considered for the atomic plant only Illinois had yet to pass a fair housing law in 1967. NCDH, "Fair Housing May Decide Site of New AEC Lab," Trends in Housing, September 1966, 1.

⁷ Ed Rutledge and Jack Wood, Wire Sent to Glenn Seaborg and John Pastore, June 2nd, 1967, Folder 16, Box 165, NCDH Papers, ARC.

⁸ Ed Rutledge and Jack E. Wood, NCDH Oral Testimony to the JCCAE, NCDH Papers, ARC, 1.

⁹ Charles Abrams, Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing (Fort Washington, New York, 1971); Scott A. Henderson, Housing and the Democratic Ideal: The Life and Thought of Charles Abrams (New York, 2000).

¹⁰ During the competitive 1960 Presidential campaign, Kennedy promised the NCDH that he would abolish housing discrimination “with the stroke of a pen” by signing an executive order. After Kennedy was elected his promise did not come so easy, as the first few years of his term passed without any action on fair housing issues. To get the President to act sooner the fair housing organization came up with a “Stroke of the Pen” protest. During this campaign the NCDH organized thousands of people to send the President pens so that Kennedy could be able to sign the executive order he promised. The President finally issued his executive order to abolish housing discrimination during Thanksgiving Day, two weeks after the 1962 mid-term elections. Kennedy would later credit the NCDH for influencing his executive order. Frances Levenson, Memo “Stroke of the Pen,” December 29, 1961, Box 130, Folder 1, NCDH Papers, ARC.

¹¹ Wood formulated his understanding on race and inequality while attending Howard University and went on to become the National Housing Secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) before serving at the NCDH. Rutledge spent almost a decade serving as Housing Director of the New York State Commission for Human Rights (NYSCHR). In 1955, the NYSCHR became the first state agency in the country to have enforcement responsibilities over preventing discrimination in housing. Also of note is the fact that fair housing activist Frank Horne mentored Rutledge, while they worked together at the Racial Relations Service (RRS) during the late 1940s and early 1950s. When he worked with Horne at the federal agency, Rutledge was able to learn valuable lessons about the ways the federal government housing policies created a pattern of segregation and unequal opportunities between whites and racial minorities. NCDH, Biography of Edward Rutledge Executive Co Director, May 1968, Folder 2, Box 15, NCDH Papers, ARC; NCDH, Biography of Jack E. Wood, Jr. NCDH Executive Co Director, March 1969, Folder 2, Box 15, NCDH Papers, ARC.

¹² Alexander Von Hoffman, “Like Fleas on a Tiger?: A Brief History of the Open Housing Movement,” Joint Center For Housing Studies Harvard University, W 98-3, August 1998, 31.

¹³ Thomas Sugrue, “Revisiting the Second Ghetto,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 3 (March 2003), 288.

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- ¹⁴ Ed Rutledge and Jack E. Wood, NCDH Oral Testimony to the JCCAE, NCDH Papers, ARC, 1.
- ¹⁵ New York Times, editorial “Vs. Scientific Luxury,” July 16th, 1967.
- ¹⁶ Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Memo, June 23rd 1967, Folder 22, Box 165, NCDH Papers, ARC.
- ¹⁷ Lowi and Ginsberg, Poliscide, 111.
- ¹⁸ Robert Semple, New York Times, “Senate Approves Weston Site,” July 16th, 1967.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Philip Hart, Draft of Statement for Senator Phillip Hart on Atomic Energy Commission Authorization for Weston Illinois, Illinois Installation, July 10th 1967, Folder 17, Box 165, NCDH Papers, ARC.
- ²¹ Other founding members of the New York fair housing committee deserve credit for the creation of the organization’s philosophy as well. These members included anti-segregation advocates from the Racial Relations Service such as Frank S. Horne and Edward Rutledge or key NAACP members such as Loren Miller, Robert Carter and Jack E. Wood. Their New York Committee became the very first of its kind because it focused solely on fair housing efforts. Alexander von Hoffman, “Like Fleas on a Tiger? A Brief History of the Open Housing Movement,” 17-20.
- ²² Henderson, Housing and the Democratic Ideal: The Life and Thought of Charles Abrams, 146.
- ²³ Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York, 1985); Robert, Fishman. Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia (New York, 1987).
- ²⁴ Urban historians Thomas Sugrue and Arnold Hirsch documented over 700 violent racial incidents occurring between 1945 and 1950 in transitional neighborhoods in Detroit and Chicago respectively. Arnold Hirsch, Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960 (New York, 1983); Thomas Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit (Princeton, N.J., 1996).
- ²⁵ Between 1934 and 1969 the percentage of American families who owned their house went from 44 to 63 with the assistance of FHA and VA long term and low interest loans. By 1962 the VA and the FHA had financed more than \$120 billion in new housing. The NCDH found that less than 2 percent of the expanded housing market was available to non-white families and most of that on a segregated basis. See Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States; Lizabeth Cohen

Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (New York, 2003); Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue ed., The New Suburban History (Chicago, 2006); Michael, Danielson *The Politics of Exclusion*. (New York, 1976); Steve Valocchi, "The Racial Bases of Capitalism and the State, and the Impact of the New Deal on African Americas," *Social Problems*. 41 (1994).

²⁶ Redlining was an FHA practice that was utilized to deny loans to African Americans in certain neighborhoods during the post-war period. The term redlining comes from the process of making red lines on a map, in which banks would use in order to decide which areas they did not want to lend to. The FHA practice of redlining meant that racial minorities could not secure mortgages in certain areas and it resulted in a large increase in racial segregation in the nation's cities. See Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America, 167-173.

²⁷ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass (Cambridge, MA 1993), 53.

²⁸ By the time of the AEC site announcement in 1967, only 27 percent of whites lived in the nation's cities compared to 55 percent of African Americans. Between 1934 and 1969, the percentage of American families who owned homes went from 44 to 63 with the assistance of the FHA and VA long term and low interest loans. By 1962 the VA and the FHA financed more than \$120 billion in new housing. The NCDH found that less than 2 percent of the expanded housing market was available to non-white families and most of that on a segregated basis. Alexander von Hoffman, "Like Fleas on a Tiger? A Brief History of the Open Housing Movement," 15-17.

²⁹ Thomas Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit, 191.

³⁰ Minutes of Meeting of the Temporary Committee to Form a National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing June 26th 1950, NCDH Papers, Folder 2, Box 12, ARC.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Juliet Saltman, Open Housing As A Social Movement (Toronto, 1971), 30.

³³ The fifteen organizations that made up the NCDH in 1950 were; The American Civil Liberties Union, The American Council on Human Rights, the American Friends Service Committee, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the American Veterans Committee, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the Board of Home Missions of the Congregational Christian Churches, the

Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Migration Division of Puerto Rican Department of Labor, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials, the National Council of Negro Women, and the National Council of Churches of Christ Race Relations Department. NCDH Leaflet, "NCDH Fair Housing Objectives," NCDH Papers, Box 13, folder 2, ARC.

³⁴ Saltman, Open Housing As A Social Movement, 30.

³⁵ Walter W Stafford, "Dilemmas of Civil Rights Groups in Developing Urban Strategies and Changes in American Federalism, 1933-1970," *Phylon* 37, no. 1 (1976): 66-67.

³⁶ Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States, 231.

³⁷ Charles Abrams, Forbidden Neighbors, ix.

³⁸ Arnold Hirsch's study of Chicago and Ronald Bayor's analysis of Atlanta also describe the ways in which urban redevelopment and renewal programs cleared large areas of slum housing along the edges of the downtown area and displaced poor racial minorities. Hirsch shows how Chicago's slum clearance, redevelopment, and public housing programs were implemented with the help of the federal government. Hirsch, Making the Second Ghetto; Ronald Bayor, "Urban Renewal, Public Housing and the Racial Shaping of Atlanta," Journal of Policy History 1(4) (1989); Kevin Gotham, Race, Real Estate and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience 1900-2000 (New York, 2002), 89.

³⁹ Arnold R. Hirsch, "Less Than Plessy: The Inner City, Suburbs, and State-Sanctioned Residential Segregation in the Age of Brown," In The New Suburban History, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago, IL 2006).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴¹ Albert M. Cole, Eisenhower's chief of the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) made it clear that he intended to do nothing to end discrimination in federal housing policies. He forcefully demonstrated his position by firing the Racial Relation Services (RRS) Director, Frank Horne. At the RRS Horne worked as a tireless advocate to abolish discrimination in federal housing policies. In 1955, Cole demonstrated that he would not entertain Horne's fair housing recommendations by forcing him out of his federal position for being too aggressive on civil rights. The firing of Horne made a strong statement about the lack of regard the Eisenhower administration had for fair housing. See Arnold R. Hirsch, "Less Than

Plessy: The Inner City, Suburbs, and State-Sanctioned Residential Segregation in the Age of Brown,” In The New Suburban History, (Chicago, IL 2006); Arnold R. Hirsch, “Choosing Segregation: Federal Housing Policy Between Shelley and Brown,” In From Tenements to The Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth Century America, (University Park, PA 2000), 217; Arnold R. Hirsch, “Containment’ On the Home Front,” Journal of Urban History, 26(2) (January 2000), 1.

⁴² Hirsch, “Less Than Plessy: The Inner City, Suburbs, and State-Sanctioned Residential Segregation in the Age of Brown,” 36.

⁴³ Fourth Annual Conference on Discrimination in Housing Press Release, January 1st 1955, NCDH Papers, Folder 1, Box 61, ARC.

⁴⁴ Saltman, Open Housing As A Social Movement, 35.

⁴⁵ NCDH, How the Federal Government Builds Ghettos, (New York, NCDH, 1967) 3, 15.

⁴⁶ Matthew Lassiter, The Silent Majority Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South (Princeton, 2006), 11.

⁴⁷ Margaret Pugh O’Mara “Uncovering the City in the Suburb: Cold War Politics, Scientific Elites, and High-Tech Spaces,” in The New Suburban History, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago, 2006), 59.

⁴⁸ Even if urban African Americans were able to keep their federal jobs, commuting to work was often costly and time consuming, and public transportation frequently did not extend to the suburbs. Charles Lamb, Housing Segregation in Suburban America Since 1960, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 16-17.

⁴⁹ Marc Gelfand, Nation of Cities, (New York, 1975), 311-314.

⁵⁰ Becky Nicolaides, My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 169.

⁵¹ Thomas Byrne Edsall, Mary D. Edsall, Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics, (New York: Norton Press, 1992); David Freund, “Making It Home: Race, Development, and the Politics of Place in Suburban Detroit, 1940-1967” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999, 1.

⁵² Freund, “Making it Home: Race, Development, and the Politics of Place in Suburban Detroit, 1940-1967,” 12.

⁵³ Kenneth D. Durr, Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980 (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 205.

⁵⁴ Becky M. Nicolaides, My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Robert O. Self, American Babylon: Race and Struggle for Postwar Oakland (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Andrew Wiese, Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Thomas W. Hanchett, Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte 1875-1975 (University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁵⁵ Freund, "Making it Home: Race, Development, and the Politics of Place in Suburban Detroit, 1940-1967," 187.

⁵⁶ Matthew Lassiter, The Silent Majority Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South, 10-11.

⁵⁷ Kenneth D. Durr, Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980, 205.

⁵⁸ James Ralph, Northern Protest: Martin Luther King Jr., Chicago and the Civil Rights Movement (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993); David J. Garrow, ed. Chicago 1966: Open Housing Marches, Summit Negotiations, and Operation Breadbasket (Brooklyn, 1989); Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering's, ed. Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago (Athens: Georgia, 1987).

⁵⁹ Lori Gail Waite, "Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles to Social Movement Mobilization: the Case of the Chicago Freedom Movement" (PdD diss., Northwestern University, 1998), 13.

⁶⁰ Andrew Wiese, Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 289.

⁶¹ Mary Patillio-McCoy, Black Picket Fences: Privileges and Peril Among the Black Middle-Class (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁶² Peniel E. Joseph, Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America, (New York, 2006). Alexander von Hoffman, "Like Fleas on a Tiger?: A Brief History of the Open Housing Movement," 35-36.

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⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁶ NCDH, "Fair Housing May Decide Site of New AEC Lab," Trends in Housing, September 1966, 1.

⁶⁷ Ed Rutledge and Jack Wood, Letter to Glenn Seaborg, January 27th, 1967, Folder 16, Box 165, NCDH Papers, ARC.

⁶⁸ "Rights Groups Join Javits in Attacking Site for Accelerator," New York Times, February 8th, 1967, 33.

⁶⁹ Ed Rutledge and Jack Wood, NCDH Oral Testimony to the JCCAE, NCDH Papers, ARC, 2.

⁷⁰ NCDH, The Impact of Housing Patterns on Job Opportunities, (New York, 1968), 1-8; William Julius Wilson, When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor (New York, 1996).

⁷¹ NCDH, The Impact of Housing Patterns on Job Opportunities, (New York, 1968), 1-8.

⁷² Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis, 141.

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